DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 022 791 TE 500 228

By-Lefevre, Helen E.

ENGLISH TEACHERS FOR JUNIOR COLLEGE REMEDIAL PROGRAMS.

Pub Date 5 Apr 68

Note-15p.; Paper read at the national meetings of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Minneapolis, Minnesota, April 5, 1968.

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.68

Descriptors-*ENGLISH, ENGLISH CURRICULUM, ENGLISH INSTRUCTION, INSERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION, *JUNIOR COLLEGES, *PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT, REMEDIAL COURSES, *REMEDIAL INSTRUCTION, REMEDIAL PROGRAMS, REMEDIAL TEACHERS, TEACHER ATTITUDES, TEACHER BACKGROUND, *TEACHER EDUCATION

After a brief discussion of the problems and defects of junior college remedial or compensatory English programs, the need for adequately trained teachers for these programs is considered. The major areas essential to the training of such teachers are identified as (1) training in English, including oral language and linguistic studies and a broad appreciation of both "established" and more neglected literatures, (2) training in background and techniques, including acquaintance with the junior college movement and its aims, grounding in the social sciences, and familiarity with the methods, materials, and equipment appropriate to the problems of this type of instruction, and (3) an internship at a junior college. A "positive teaching" approach is emphasized in all areas. (BN)

Helen E. Lefevre
Community College of Philadelphia
34 South 11 Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19107

(A paper read at the national meetings of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Minneapolis, April 5, 1968)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

ENGLISH TEACHERS FOR JUNIOR COLLEGE REMEDIAL PROGRAMS

The preparatory or remedial program is becoming more important across the nation, especially in public two-year colleges. Harold Howe II, the U.S. Commissioner of Education, has suggested that colleges should consider adding "a whole year of pre-college compensatory work" to their regular programs. And S. V. Martorana, dean of two-year colleges for the State University of New York, goes still further; he declares that "the only question about universal higher education is how -- not whether -- it will be achieved."[1] A recent pamphlet published by the American Association of Junior Colleges, The Community College Commitment to the Inner City, makes clear the urban involvement which the future holds.[2] The consequences for departments of English are clear.

The kind of English teaching involved in a preparatory or compensatory program is not always remedial in the usual sense of the word. Some students from a preparatory curriculum move on to transfer or higher-level terminal study, and for them the work has been "remedial." For some others, this pre-college curriculum constitutes a brief post-high school education; these students go on, hopefully, to employment, however minimal. Many others will be ready to enter certificate programs of the kind being initiated in dozens of junior colleges, programs designed to train teacher aides, hospital aides, or low-level technicians of various kinds. The

ED022791
TE 500 228

preparatory or remedial program has many uses.

The English component in any kind of preparatory or remedial program is vital. There seems to be general agreement that verbal deficiencies constitute a major barrier -- possibly the major barrier -- to success in college work. And it is generally agreed that many entering students in the junior college lack adequate verbal skills.

Yet compensatory English teaching, taken in general, has been described by one writer an "an academic ulcer,"[3] and by another as "without question... the weakest part of community college English programs."[4]

The dropout problem in public junior colleges may be attributed in no small part, says Bossone, to this failure in remedial English instruction.

> Quite simply the public junior college does not appear to be achieving one of its major objectives: to offer effective remediation to those students who come from a limiting environment with linguistic handicaps.[5]

Both the program itself -- often vaguely defined -- and the performance of the teacher -- usually poorly prepared for his task -- have been blamed for this common failure. The personal qualities of the teacher are often emphasized. The Junior College Research Review reports:

> Special attention is given in all reports to the selection of teachers for the low achiever. It is specially recognized that such assignments require special teaching traits including broad understanding of students' problems and certain communicative abilities not common to all in the teaching profession.[6]

And Eunice Newton, writing in the Journal of Negro Education, points out the need for an enthusiastic and empathetic teacher for the verbally different student.[7]

But teachers for compensatory English classes are made, not born. Adequate training is the primary need. It is the well-prepared teacher

who can, with enthusiasm and confidence, tackle the very special task at hand: teaching basic language skills to young adults. Teachers of compensatory English need not less knowledge and skill than regular teachers, but more. Their task demands not only human sympathy and dedication, but rigorous training and practice.

As for the program itself, vagueness of objectives, lack of serious planning, ignorance of modern language scholarship and methodology, as well as unrealistic expectations, have been blamed.[8] John Weber emphasizes the need for realistic goals.

> Just what can be done with a student whose verbal skills are low is an open question.... But people may as well know that about forty-five hours a semester in a classroom is not enough to break bad writing habits of years' standing and replace them with new ones, to improve reading skills significantly, to inspire some orginal thoughts on difficult subjects, and to teach remedial students to write an acceptable essay. Perhaps even twice as much time would not be enough.[9]

The U.C.L.A. Junior College Preparation Program stresses the desirability of setting "specific, measurable objectives," with tests and other assessments planned in advance.

> Both teaching and learning may be assumed to have occurred only when observable changes are demonstrated by the learner.[10]

Skill in planning and implementing more clearly defined programs in English must be one aim of the training of English teachers for the junior colleges, especially teachers for our poorer students.

Many roads may lead to adequate preparation for teaching in compensatory English programs: individual study; attendance at English workshops stressing modern approaches to language and language teaching; in-service training by the junior college or a local university; participation as a

member of a teaching team. The suggestions made below are couched in terms of knowledge and skills, however attained.

The emphasis here is on training for teaching in preparatory or remedial programs; in practical terms, however, many junior college English teachers need to be equipped to handle such compensatory teaching assignments, at least on occasion or part-time. In some situations, most of the teachers on the job should be so equipped. In the background of teachers for compensatory English programs, I see three main ingredients.

Ingredient One: Training in English.

A. And under training in English, first and foremost comes work in oral language. Awareness of oral language as the basic form of human communication will lead the teacher to an appreciation of the emphasis on speech, and on discussion and drama, which came out of the Dartmouth seminar. Speaking of the training of English teachers in general, John Dixon, author of Growth through English, points out that

> ...modern industrial society has recently moved strongly toward a discussion culture.

Moreover, says Dixon:

> We have to accept the fact that, in terms of media of communication, popular culture is already dominated by the audio-visual, the uses of which will spread.[11]

This is the world in which our students live. If the youth of the inner city want to talk and talk but not to discuss, perhaps our first task is to lead them to discussion, possibly even to structured discussion.

A transition from a major emphasis on writing and print to a considerable emphasis on oral aspects of communication will not come easy to all of us now in the field. Training in oral language will help future teachers

to adjust to such a transition. And this transition is already being made, or has already been made, in some of the preparatory programs now current.

Training in oral language will enable us also to understand and work with the speech patterns which our students bring with them into the junior college classroom. The importance of oral work generally, and in remedial programs particularly, can hardly be overestimated. Improvement of spoken English is for some students the only practical route to improvement of written English.

B. Second, under training in English, comes <u>language study in general</u>. As one community college president has said:

> The present graduate programs which are heavily oriented toward literature are not providing the kinds of experience needed by teachers who will be teaching writing and reading for young people and adults. [12]

Modern linguistic study provides a descriptive account of English which is much better suited to the poorly prepared student than is traditional grammar, and provides also new understandings of the acquisition of language and knowledge concerning language growth. As far as acquaintance with the current analyses of the language goes, John M. Sinclair has suggested that the minimum linguistic competence of any English teacher should include the ability to

(a) assess the role of linguistics in direct teaching in the classroom;

(b) express views about the nature of language and the structure of English which are in accord with the best scholarship available;

(c) counterbalance the effects of his own learning of English;

(d) guarantee the student that the linguistic theory and system used on or near him will be as self-consistent and comprehensive as possible.

Every teacher, adds Mr. Sinclair, needs to be equipped to follow developments in language theory and description throughout his teaching career.[13] The English teacher must always, of course, differentiate clearly between what

he needs to know and what his students need to know.

The study of language for the junior college teacher should certainly include the scholarly work on dialects by Labov, McDavid, and others. A thorough understanding of the meaning of the term dialect -- my dialect, your dialect, the dialects of our students -- will give a basis for a number of attitudes and techniques in preparatory teaching.

And I must mention the matter of phonology. In remedial work particularly, the teacher needs to know the phonology of English, and the relationship between the phonology and graphology, the sounds and spellings of the language. Some English teachers secretly regard printed English as the language, and tend fuzzily to equate letters and sounds.

Training for the teacher should certainly include, also, writing experience beyond the level of freshman English. A well-known junior college research study found that in the colleges reviewed, some 50 per cent of the deans indicated that their English teachers were in general not adequately prepared to teach language and composition.[14] Such an inadequacy becomes really damaging in preparatory or remedial classes.

The Tempe conference on English in the junior college raised the issue of specialists within the junior college English department, specialists in reading, writing, and speech. When specialized training is lacking, however, a sound training in language can develop what has been called a "language arts generalist." Such language training provides a solid basis; in-service training can do the rest. The result could just be a more integrated approach to all the language skills -- the integrated approach so often advocated and so seldom implemented. I personally believe, for example, after many years of work in remedial reading, that English teachers

make the best reading teachers, because of their sensitivity to the English language -- the language we are, after all, teaching them to read, whether it is the English of history textbooks, or the English of Ginsberg or of Baldwin. Political slogans on billboards, movie blurbs outside theaters, luscious language on menus -- all are interesting examples of ways of using the English language. And it is the English teacher who can understand the vital role of specific language constructs -- appositives, for example -- as vehicles of meaning. An English teacher who understands language growth will know the difference in reading difficulty between a conditional clause in the introductory and the final position.

C. Third, under training in English, comes a broad general knowledge of literature. Literature in English today includes not only the literature of England and America, but the literature of Canada, Australia, and some of the literature from Africa and other lands. Perhaps most vital for the teacher in the preparatory classroom is an awareness of literary experience beyond the boundaries of "established" literature. An attempt to impose on our most typical students -- at least in the public two-year colleges -- something they usually have no personal desire for, the great literary tradition of the western world, may thwart rather than fulfill them. A student who simply cannot appreciate "Adonais" may still appreciate "Ozymandias"; a student who cannot appreciate "Ozymandias" may still appreciate "John Brown's Body" or Sandburg's "Grass." And if he cannot appreciate these, he may enjoy a lively ballad, or Ginsberg's "Howl" -- and these have merit too. It's the experience that counts.

Consider Professor Markwardt's account of the British attitude toward the teaching of literature. We Americans, he says, view literature

> ...as a means of transmitting the cultural heritage of the English-speaking peoples from one generation to the

> next, assuming that this in essence represents a combination of the Graeco-Roman and the Judeo-Christian traditions. Our British colleagues considered this irrelevant, if not downright undesirable....At all events, the English seemed to interpret what we called the cultural heritage as an ossification of middle-class values and attitudes. They honestly feared that to recognize this cultural transmission as a valid educational aim, for the school English program at least, would stand in the way of any revision of or improvement upon the prevalent value system.[15]

Literature as tradition belongs to the English major and also perhaps in an interdisciplinary course like the one in social history-literature-philosophy suggested by Roger Garrison.[16]

Literature as experience belongs to everyone. And it is this approach that makes meaningful a recent poem or short story from Africa or Australia or Mississippi. This approach, I feel confident, is more workable with the less academically oriented student.

The most immediate experience of literature available to our students -- including many not in compensatory English classes -- comes through films. The movie version of Wuthering Heights will reach students who could never unscramble the opening sequence of the novel, much less appreciate the book as a whole. This is true of many other classics which have been transformed into excellent films ~~which~~ That preserve the emotional and value content of their originals. The film itself becomes literature; the same can be said of many films not based on literary works in which the talents of scriptwriter, director and actors combine to produce great drama.

Ingredient Two: Background and techniques. This part of the teacher's training may well take place in the College of Education.

A. First on the agenda is an acquaintance with the junior college movement and its aims: a general knowledge of the various types of junior and community colleges, ranging from the small, private two-year college, to the large, public, urban community college, capable of serving many kinds of students.

B. Next comes background work in the social sciences. This will, in the first place, provide insights into the various worlds, ghetto or suburb, from which our students come when they step through the open door of our colleges.

Basic insights from the social sciences will help us also to view language as human behavior -- as group behavior in a social setting, and as individual behavior. This is important in all junior college English programs; it is essential in a preparatory program. If we understand the vital relationship between the individual and his own idiolect, his personal language, so intimate a part of his personality, we will not do violence to him by crude corrections of his speech. If we understand how his language binds him to family and peers, we will offer him standard English as a second dialect only. And we will use such persuasive methods as roleplaying, choral reading, or the methods of structured dialogue often used in second language teaching. Moreover, we must understand and somehow cope with the black power advocate who wishes to retain his own dialect as a status symbol.[17]

Moreover, some aspects of learning theory are helpful for the teacher of English. I'd like to mention just one point, the damage that can be done, in any classroom and especially in the preparatory classroom, by a negative and prescriptive approach to language teaching. Here's an example, given by a specialist in educational psychology. Professor Ruth Ellis, in order to demonstrate one basic learning concept, likes to ask a student to memorize -- before the class -- four lines of poetry. With gentle encouragement, he masters it quickly. Instead of gentle encouragement, the next student receives gentle criticism of his mistakes and usually goes to pieces before his classmates. Confirmation of the correct response in learning pays off a million to one against confirmation of error, Dr. Ellis, points

out, yet our whole system of education is built to focus on the error.[18] Prescriptivism is the enemy. What one elementary teacher of my acquaintance calls "positive teaching" is a boon to all students, particularly those who need special help.

The enthusiastic, empathetic teacher called for in Eunice Newton's article "Verbal Destitution" is the teacher of choice. The basis for such enthusiasm and empathy must be an understanding which bridges the language gap between teacher and student. While some students may be verbally poor, or even destitute, others may be verbally rich, in their own dialects; all are probably verbally different from the teacher. Many of you have witnessed the culture shock which teachers without an understanding of the social and psychological role of language often experience when dealing with verbally different students. The result may be frustration, withdrawal, or, at the worst, a smug feeling of superiority.

C. Another essential element in the professional training of an English teacher in a public two-year college -- particularly the teacher who may need to teach preparatory or remedial courses -- is familarity with methods and materials appropriate to the actual problems involved in this kind of instruction. The difference between activity and learning is not always clear to a beginning teacher. Only methods and materials suited to the needs of the students in the classroom will produce learning.

Failing students is not enough.

> The junior college cannot long abide instructors who delight in failure. Instructors who must supply evidence that their students have learned, in effect acknowledge accountability for that learning. They will strive to make it come about and make all effort to reduce waste in human resources. A teacher teaches; he does not sort out.[19]

Awarding an A or an F may mean merely that one student has an aptitude for the work; the other does not. We have sorted out the students, but we may

not have taught them much. By what methods can we bring about learning?

We are told, for example, that with junior college students the concrete approach, not the abstract, will work. This is in itself an abstraction. Practice for the fledgling English teacher in using and in devising a concrete approach to his own subject matter will equip him to implement this valuable concept in his own classroom. An exposure-imitation procedure using only correct, and hopefully interesting, models, both sentences and paragraphs, is one possibility, at least as a start.

We are told that "certain testlike operations facilitate learning."[20] Certainly some testlike operations serve only to "sort out" the students. Should not the teacher know which are which? Testing and grading are a vital part of all teaching. But testlike operations which facilitate learning are particularly important for the junior college student who did not study and did not learn in high school, and who doesn't know how to go about the whole process of studying and learning. A pre-test -- or two -- before the actual test will often facilitate learning; the two can be complementary or at two levels of difficulty. Well-structured testing helps to build a strong course, one in which even the D student feels more secure because he knows just where he stands.

In the junior college, to solve the difficult instructional problems we face and will increasingly face, we need to learn to be very selective of both materials and methods of instruction. Recent professional literature is full of practical suggestions; some of these have proved their worth. Knowledge of developments in methods of teaching standard English as a second dialect, for example, seems almost essential for the preparatory teacher, at least in an urban or rural setting.[21] Suggestions from the professional

literature on teaching foreign languages can also be helpful. Such methods can be reviewed and evaluated by the teacher only on the basis of a sound training in the English language. For example, an understanding of how a child acquires his own version of English can be helpful as one basis for the selection of classroom method.[22] A teacher with such an understanding can differentiate between an abstract analytical approach, valuable to the advanced student studying the grammatical system of standard English, and an imitative practice approach, valuable to the preparatory student learning to use standard English.

D. Finally, if this is not the straw that breaks the camel's back, a working knowledge of the use of such audio-visual tools as the overhead projector, films, and tape recorders, and the language lab will be helpful for the teacher of the future. How many of us now on the job have had such training? An acquaintance with specific ways of judging programmed instruction, and its proper uses, and with the current state of computer assisted instruction -- as well as better things to come -- is desirable too. Moreover, some familiarity with team teaching patterns, and preparation for the emerging role of teacher aides, will help to prepare the new teacher for the school world of future.[23] A systematic acquaintance with the journals and associations in his field will assist him to keep in touch with further developments as they occur.

But what of research techniques? Should there be training for every individual junior college teacher in such techniques? Perhaps the only realistic possibility may be that when the teacher is ready to enter into a research problem, along with his colleagues, his college will in the future provide him with the statistical help he needs, and with information concerning the best research design for his purpose -- possibly one developed after his departure from graduate school.

Ingredient Three: An internship in a junior college. If possible, the teacher should do practice teaching in more than one such institution. In many large cities today, this is not an unrealistic goal. If this supervised teaching includes two preparations, perhaps one could be for a course in oral language or in basic reading skills.

A training program like the one I have described might not leave much room for specialization in the sources of Chaucer's Tales, but in my opinion it could produce a teacher ready and able to cope with the very real situation in a typical two-year college classroom, and most particularly in a preparatory classroom. You have heard my recipe for such a teacher in terms not of degrees, but of the content of his training. Yet such training should surely qualify a prospective teacher for both an M.A. in English and a certificate as a specialist in junior college teaching, the combination that Roger Garrison suggests.

To sum up, the positive approach -- "positive teaching" -- and a knowledge of appropriate materials and appropriate methods are both vital in preparatory or remedial work. And both can have a solid foundation only in background understandings from the social sciences, including learning theory; in a broad, humane view of literature; and in scholarly training in spoken and written English, as a basis for teaching the essential skills of language -- speaking and listening, writing and reading.

NOTES

[1]These two quotations are from the Chronicle of Higher Education, November 8, 1967, p. 1, and p. 4.

[2]American Association of Junior Colleges, 1967.

[3]Richard Bossone, "Remedial English in Junior Colleges: An Unresolved Problem," College Composition and Communication, May, 1967, p. 89.

[4]John Weber, "Recommendations for Better English Instruction," Junior College Journal, February, 1968, p. 33.

[5]Bossone, op. cit., p. 92.

[6]John E. Roueche, "The Junior College Remedial Program," November, 1967, p. 2. See also Basic Education Teachers: Seven Needed Qualities, by Frank M. Pearce, Modesto Junior College, Modesto, California, 1966.

[7]"Verbal Destitution," The Journal of Negro Education, Fall, 1960, p. 499.

[8]See, for example, the Bossone article cited earlier, pp. 89-90; also John E. Roueche, "The Junior College Remedial Program," Junior College Research Research Review, November, 1967, pp. 1-2

[9]Weber, op. cit., p. 33.

[10]John E. Roueche, "Selected Teacher Preparation Programs," Junior College Research Review, May, 1968, p. 1.

[11]This report on the Dartmouth seminar was published by the National Association for the Teaching of English (Reading, England), 1967. References are to pp. 107, 111, and 112.

[12]Clifford G. Erickson, "Recruitment of Faculty for the Community and Junior Colleges," In Search of Leaders, AHE Bulletin, in Current Issues in Higher Education series, 1967.

[13]"Linguistics and the Teaching of English," a paper presented at the Dartmouth conference.

[14]The Training and Work of California Public Junior College Teachers of English, by Richard Bossone. Riverside Schools, Riverside, California, 1964.

[15]College English, February, 1967, p. 387

[16]Junior College Faculty: Issues and Problems, American Association of Junior Colleges, 1967.

[17]Such an attitude is suggested, for example, in the lead article by Ernece Kelly in the May, 1968 issue of College Composition and Communication, "Murder of the American Dream," p. 106.

[18]This account is from the Chronicle of Higher Education. Professor Ellis is located at Northeastern Illinois State College, Chicago.

[19]Arthur M. Cohen, "Teacher Preparation: Rationale and Practice," Junior College Journal, May, 1967, p. 25.

[20]Wendell Weaver and Albert Kingston, "Questioning in Content Reading," Journal of Reading, November, 1967, p. 140.

[21]For example, see William Slager, "Effecting Dialect Change Through Oral Drill," English Journal, November, 1967, p. 1166.

[22]An excellent source on this point is "The Child's Acquisition of Language," in Carl Lefevre's Linguistics and the Teaching of ~~English~~ Reading, McGraw-Hill, 1964.

[23]A recent publication by the Bank Street College of Education, New Careers and Roles in the American School (1967), provides a guide to the use of teacher aides today.